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ABSTRACT

To understand the problems that urban schools encounter educating Puerto Rican students, teachers must understand the history and culture of Puerto Rico, which has been a melting pot of many different cultures. North American culture became prevalent after the Spanish-American War (1898) and the passage of the Jones Act (1917), which gave U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. Citizenship led to Puerto Rican migration to the United States. Reaching its highest levels in the 1940's and 50's, three main reasons accounted for the Puerto Rican migration: (1) economics; (2) hope for upward mobility; and (3) encouragement from the Puerto Rican government. Puerto Ricans, however, did not find what they had expected and experienced problems with broken families, drugs, crime, and the differing values between home and school. Lack of knowledge of the history and culture of Puerto Rico, inadequate teaching and curricula, social and emotional disorientation, a sense of inferiority, and poor self-image have affected how second and third generation Puerto Ricans, the Neo-Ricans, currently view education. On the positive side more Puerto Rican students go to college and there is a renewed interest in the Spanish language even though English is the primary language of Puerto Rico. Still, recommendations for educating Puerto Ricans and promoting adjustment in communities must be found. To accelerate the learning and adjustment of first and second generation Puerto Ricans, recommendations have been made by the New York City Puerto Rican Study which include: (1) use of the experiential approach to understanding English; (2) the vocabulary and structural approach to speaking and writing English; and (3) a more direct approach to reading. Additionally, the schools need to assist parents of non-English speaking students in matters pertaining to the child's welfare. (APG)

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by

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Assimilation and Educational Determinants for Puerto Rican Children

Julianne M. Wargacki

This research paper provides some insight into the problems Puerto Ricans face when acculturation occurs. It presents the problems the urban schools meet as a result of different social and cultural patterns of behavior involved with this particular ethnic group. This paper also offers some recommendations that may prove useful in educating non-English-speaking Puerto Ricans and those of second and third generation Puerto Ricans.

To understand the problems urban schools encounter with regard to educating Puerto Rican students, one must understand the history of their culture. Puerto Rico can be considered in a broad sense a "melting pot" culture. It comes from a rich cultural background, a mixture of Indian, Spanish, African, and North American influences.

The island was first occupied centuries ago by nomadic, archaic Indians who were fishermen with a simple culture. The next Indian development was from the Arawak tribe, probably from South America. They were called Tainos--the good ones. The Indians reached their most productive cultural period from about 1200 A.D. to 1500 A.D. Their island was known as Boriquen, meaning land of the brave men.

After Columbus came upon the island of Boriquen on November 19, 1493, Spanish settlers began moving there

in the 1500's. Spain retained Puerto Rico for almost four centuries. The Spanish influence proved the major one. Its cultural patterns affected religion, education, family life, customs, language, architecture, town life organized around a plaza and a church, and the individual's sense of personal dignity. As in other Spanish cultures, the Puerto Ricans placed great emphasis on the respect due to each individual and on family value.

The first black person recorded in Puerto Rico came with Ponce de Leon in 1509. Many Africans were later brought to the island as slaves. They came from the areas of Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Dahomey, and through English slave-traders from the Congo and Senegal. The African people were assimilated into the national culture rather than separated from it. Intermarriage was not unusual.

The African influence in Puerto Rico remains a vital part of the island's cultural mixture and ethnic amalgamation, proceeding through many aspects of life--art, music, politics, education, religious customs, cooking styles, literature, and science.

In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, a United States military government was installed in Puerto Rico. The island was declared a possession of the United States through

the ratification of the Treaty of Paris in 1899. Life in Puerto Rico after 1898 began to reflect the influence of North American culture. Puerto Rico experienced extensive cultural changes--English replaced Spanish as the language spoken in the schools, American holidays were celebrated, an American governor was appointed by the United States government.

In 1917, the Jones Act was approved by Congress, giving American citizenship to all Puerto Ricans with no quota restictions or visa requirements on Puerto Rican migrants. This United States action increased the Puerto Rican migration. The great migration from Puerto Rico started in the early part of the century. The heaviest flow of migrants came in the late 1940's and 50's and has continued ever since. Puerto Ricans migrated to major cities on the mainland such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Newark. By 1940 there were close to 70,000 Puerto Ricans on the mainland. They migrated with the great hope of "making it" in the American mainland. Why did they migrate to the United States?

There are three main reasons for the migration of Puerto Ricans. One reason was a matter of economics. In 1940, Puerto Rico had a lagre population per square mile, a high rate of unemployment and poverty was everywhere. Ways for

economic improvement did not exist for them. Moving to the United states was thought to be an answer to their financial problems. Also, at that time, the United States had a great demand for unskilled or semi-skilled workers in industries and in jobs like janitors, dishwashers, and hotel maids.

Another reason for the Puerto Rican migration was the search for a better life. There was no hope of upward social mobility in rural areas of Puerto Rico. Not only did the Puerto Ricans migrate to the United States for employment but also to seek a better life than they had in Puerto Rico. A better life meant water and electricity in the apartment, stores around the corner, radio and other types of entertainment. It also meant furniture and food for their children.

The third reason was the Puerto Rican Government's attitude toward migration. Migration was not discouraged by the government of Puerto Rico. In fact, the government made arrangements to get low air transportation rates between the island and the mainland. It was relatively easy to move from Puerto Rico to the United States.

Today, Puerto Ricans are found in large numbers in most of the big cities of the United States. In 1970, the Office of the United States Census reported that by 1970 there were

1,391,463 Puerto Ricans on the mainland.

Puerto Ricans did not find the hopes they had expected. They are the minority group that benefits the least from educational programs, health, housing, and political involvement in the United States.

The Puerto Rican family's lifestyle has suffered too. There are many broken families. Unemployed youngsters are driven to crime and drugs. Most of the Puerto Ricans migrate in family groups; and when they arrive in the mainland, many conflicts of values and roles emerge that tend to weaken the family ties. An example being that employment is easier for women than for men. This reverses the husband-wife roles and affects the children's mother and father role images, since these children are accustomed to seeing their mother at home while the father works.

One of the most difficult things for the Puerto Rican parents to accept is the way American children are reared. The Puerto Rican child is taught to be humble and dependent whereas the American child is taught to be aggressive, independent, and competitive. When the Puerto Rican child behaves according to American patterns, he is considered disrespectful by his parents. The values of the child and the values of the parents conflict since the children are learning other values and attitudes in school. These conflicts

in behavior affect the family life style resulting in broken families.

Most Puerto Ricans stayed on the mainland and raised their children in the United States. Most of the second or third generation Puerto Ricans on the mainland are from New York. This is the reason they are called "Neo-Ricans". The term is a sociological one used to identify the thousands of Puerto Ricans who were born and reared in the United States. There are characteristics applicable to the Neo-Ricans which affect their education. They are as follows:

1. Back and forth travel between the Island and the mainland is not common among second and third generation Puerto Ricans: therefore, the typical Neo-Rican doesn't know much about the history and culture of the island and his ancestors.
2. Neo-Ricans are taught inadequately on the mainland. The inadequacy is seen in the curricula of the school, which is far apart from the students' culture, attitudes and values. Neo-Ricans have been conditioned to the life styles of slums in large cities. These youngsters show rebellion

against the authority of parents and teachers. The Puerto Ricans newly arrived from the island view their teachers as a "second parent" and treat them accordingly.

3. Neo-Ricans show social and emotional disorientation, inferiority, and poor self image. These pyschological problems affect their academic performance and their development within the society. Most Puerto Rican youngsters come from the lower socio-economic class and they show these social class patterns in their behavior. Because these behaviors are combined with various ethnic and cultural patterns; they make self analysis and identification difficult. The Neo-Ricans do not know to which group they belong.
4. There is growing Puerto Rican participation at the collegiate level. Puerto Rican students are demanding curricula of the university to include the history and culture of Puerto Rico. This has improved the American interest in Puerto Rican history and culture. But in spite of the marked progress, Puerto Ricans are still

behind academically.

5. Neo-Ricans use English in everyday situations. Since English is the mainland-born Puerto Rican's primary medium of communication, they tend to place a high value on it. They ask and answer questions in English, watch English television programs, and listen to English radio programs. Today, however, Neo-Ricans are showing more interest in knowing the Spanish language.

These characteristics show that, little by little, the Neo-Ricans are enculturating and are aware of the fact that they have to prepare themselves educationally to improve the image of Puerto Rico on the mainland.

Schools must find the most effective methods of teaching English to newly arrived Puerto Rican children and to promote "a more rapid and more effective adjustment of Puerto Rican parents and children to the community and of the community to them". Many programs in the schools are ineffective because of budget problems, rigid structures, and regulations, a lack of adequate personnel, discontinuity, inconsistency, and inadequate evaluation. The problem is how to enable the child to master both English and Spanish.

In January, 1968 Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act providing financial assistance to meet the special educational needs of children with limited English-speaking ability. The view that prevailed was that Spanish should be taught as an instrument for learning English more easily so that acculturation to American society could be more rapid.

The Puerto Rican Study is a four-year inquiry into the education and adjustment of Puerto Rican pupils in the public schools of the City of New York. Recommendations of this st study include utilizing the experiental approach to understanding English; the vocabulary and structural approach which leads to greater gains in the ability to speak and write English; plus using a more direct attack on reading.

Further recommendations to achieve continuimg improvement of education for non-English-speaking Puerto Rican children are for schools to keep policies governing the grouping of non-English-speaking pupils flexible. School programs must place the emphasis upon serving the needs of the individual pupil. Schools must recognize "English as a second language" as an area of specialization that cuts across many subject areas. It starts with the aural-oral approach leading gradually into reading and writing.

Another responsibility of the school is to assist,

counsel, and cooperate with parents of non-English-speaking pupils in all matters pertaining to the child's welfare. These are some of the basic recommendations that are mentioned in the study which will accelerate the learning and adjustment of first and second generation Puerto Rican and other non-English-speaking pupils.

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